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Black Market for Raw Milk Emerges, But Consumer Beware

(Phoenix) -- Many consumers believe that raw milk is better for their health than the pasteurized version, but they do not know such a product can carry organisms that can cause illness. A simple Google search reveals a number of websites touting the health benefits of raw milk. These websites and public perception are causing an increase in demand for the raw product. Below are some common questions regarding raw milk.

What dangerous organisms does raw milk carry and what illnesses do they cause?

“Raw milk may harbor a host of disease-causing organisms (pathogens), such as the bacteria campylobacter, escherichia, listeria, salmonella, yersinia, and brucella. Common symptoms of foodborne illness from many of these types of bacteria include diarrhea, stomach cramps, fever, headache, vomiting, and exhaustion. Most healthy people recover from foodborne illness within a short period of time, but others may have symptoms that are chronic, severe, or life-threatening. ¹”

Each year in the United States, foodborne disease causes an estimated 76 million illnesses. Of these, an estimated 1.4 million are caused by *Salmonella*, resulting in approximately 16,000 hospitalizations and 580 deaths. Raw bulk tank milk can contain one or more species of pathogenic bacteria, including *Salmonella* spp.. During 1972--2000, a total of 58 raw milk--associated outbreaks were reported to CDC, of which 17 (29%) were caused by *Salmonella* spp.

Who is most at risk?

Children, elderly or anyone with a weakened immune system is compromised.

Have any facilities in Arizona been shutdown over this issue?

In the last year, the Arizona Department of Agriculture has ordered cease and desist orders to three unlicensed milk producers: Two were located near Tucson and one near Prescott, Arizona.

Why is this product gaining in popularity?

Many distributors and consumers of this product claim it has healing powers and health benefits.

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¹ Food and Drug Administration. <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/qa-fdb47.html>